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Gender Symmetry in Prevalence, Severity, and Chronicity of Physical Aggression Against Dating Partners by University Students in Mexico and USA†

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The paper reports results from analyses of the physical aggression against dating partners by four samples of university students in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, Mexican Americans and Non-Mexican Whites in El Paso and Lubbock Texas, and New Hampshire ($N = 1{,}544$). The percent reporting partner violence (PV) was high in all samples, but also differed significantly between samples. The lowest rate was in New Hampshire (29.7%), followed by Texas, Non-Mexican Whites (30.9%), Texas Mexican American (34.2%), and the highest rate was in Juarez (46.1%). When only severe assaults were compared, the differences between samples was similar, i.e., lowest in New Hampshire and highest in Juarez. In all four samples, there was no significant difference between males and females in either the overall prevalence of physical aggression or the prevalence of severe attacks. Among the 553 couples where one or both of the partners were violent, in almost three quarters of the cases (71.2%) there was gender symmetry in the sense that both partners engaged in this type of behavior. When only one partner was violent, this was twice as likely to be the female partner (19.0%) as the male partner (9.8%). Among the 205 couples where there was an act of severe aggression, symmetry was less prevalent (56.6%), but when only one partner was violent, it was again twice as likely to be the female partner (29.8% female only versus 13.7 male partner only). These results are consistent with the gender symmetry in PV found in many studies. They extend those results by showing that gender symmetry prevails in four different cultural contexts. The presence of gender symmetry in these different cultural contexts, combined with studies showing that women are injured more often and more seriously by partner-assaults, and studies showing that women initiate PV as often as men, suggests that programs and policies aimed at primary prevention of PV *by women* are crucial to ending PV and for reducing the victimization of men and women. Aggr. Behav. 33:281–290, 2007. **© 2007 Wiley-Liss, Inc.**

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INTRODUCTION

A controversial issue in research on intimate partner violence (PV from here on) is whether this type of assault is primarily a crime perpetrated by men. A previous paper on this issue [Straus, 1999] shows that when the statistics are based on data from the police or from surveys on crime victimization from 70 to 95% of PV perpetrators are men. On the other hand, the results of almost 200 studies using data from surveys of family problems and conflicts show that "…women are as physically aggressive, or more aggressive, than men in their relationships…. The aggregate sample size in the reviewed studies exceeds 58,000." [see also Archer, 2000; Fiebert, 1997; p 273]. The reason why police and crime survey data show PV to be a crime by males, whereas surveys of conflicts between partners in a couple relationship show that it is usually symmetrical or mutual were analyzed in a previous paper [Straus, 1999] and will not be repeated here. Rather, this study is intended to move beyond tabulating the percent of men and women who had assaulted a partner during the time period covered

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by the study (typically the past year), by providing information on important additional aspects of PV such as the severity, chronicity of the assaults, and gender symmetry of assaults. Specifically, the purposes are:

- To determine the degree to which gender symmetry in PV is found in the diverse socio-cultural contexts in Mexico and the United States.
- To provide more detailed data on gender symmetry by
  - Providing data on the severity and chronicity of attacks by males and females.
  - Classifying couples into three groups: mutually violent, male partner only, and female partner only.
- To compare results based on data provided by male and female respondents.

METHODS

Samples

The data is from the first four samples of the International Dating Violence Study for which data became available. A description of the study and a copy of the questionnaire used is available on the website http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2. The data were obtained by administering questionnaires to students in introductory sociology and psychology classes at the Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, University of Texas at El Paso, Texas Technological University, and the University of New Hampshire.

The data were gathered using procedures reviewed and approved by the boards for protection of human subjects at each of these universities. The purpose of the study and the students' right to not participate were explained orally as well as in printed form at the beginning of each session. Participants were told that the questionnaire asked about their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences they may have had, and that the questionnaire included questions on sensitive issues, including sexual relationships. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. A debriefing form was given to each participant as they left. The form explained the study in more detail and provided names and telephone numbers of area mental health services and community resources such as services for battered women. Although 1,554 students completed the questionnaire, as in other surveys, not everyone answered every question. Indeed, to respect the privacy and the voluntary nature of participation the instructions emphasized that respondents were free to omit any question they did not wish to answer. One hundred and eight students (6.9%) did not answer all the questions on violence against a partner. The number of cases analyzed was 1,446 for most of the analyses. However, some analyses are based on as few as 159 cases because they were restricted to the relatively small proportion of respondents who severely assaulted a partner (see below).

The characteristics of the students in each of the samples are given in Table I. A much larger percent of the students in the New Hampshire and Juarez samples were in their first year at the university and they are younger than both of the Texas samples. This could result in a spurious finding of higher rates of violence in New Hampshire and Juarez because, as will be shown below PV decreases sharply with age. Consequently, where possible, the analysis controlled for age of the respondent. Including age as a covariate also served to partly control other differences in Table I that were found to be associated with age in this sample, such as the length of the relationship, a relationship involving sex, and cohabitation.

MEASURES

Physical Assault

The revised Conflict Tactics Scales or CTS2 [Straus et al., 1996] was used to measure physical assault by the respondent. See Straus et al. [1996] for a complete list of the CTS questions and for data on validity and reliability. The CTS has been used in many studies of both married and dating partners in the past 25 years and there is extensive evidence of reliability and validity [Archer, 1999; Straus, 1990, 2004]. Respondents are asked to indicate how often they did each of the acts in the CTS and how often their partner did. This allows for analysis of symmetry, as well as patterns of the respondent's behavior. The CTS2 has scales to measure Physical Assault, Injury, Sexual Coercion, Psychological Aggression, and Negotiation. The analyses in this paper used data from the Physical Assault scale.

The CTS2 includes subscales for two levels of severity. The Minor Assault scale includes acts such as slapping or throwing something at the partner. The Severe Assault scale includes acts such as punching and choking. The difference between the minor and severe subscales is analogous to the US legal categories of simple assault and aggravated assault. The following scores were computed:

TABLE I. Characteristics of Respondents and Their Relationships

Characteristic	NH	Texas non-Mex	Texas Mex-Am.	Ciudad Juarez	χ^2
Number of participants[a]	770	190	291	290	
Percent female	67.9	55.3	57.4	81.0	49.98**
Year in college					
Freshman	29.8	7.9	16.2	50.7	265.25**
Sophomore	36.2	23.8	14.8	29.0	
Junior	17.6	29.1	25.5	9.0	
Senior	16.5	39.2	43.4	11.4	
Age in years (mean)	19.5	21.2	21.6	19.9	142.39**
Father's education					
High school/less	27.0	23.2	55.1	70.8	92.57**
Some college	21.6	24.3	27.2	6.3	
College degree	25.7	26.4	8.9	18.2	
Graduate degree	25.5	25.9	8.6	4.5	
Mother's education					
High school/less	25.8	26.3	65.1	87.3	118.83**
Some college	29.0	29.4	21.3	2.4	
College degree	26.5	22.6	7.5	9.1	
Graduate degree	18.5	21.5	5.8	1.0	
Reporting current relation	51.8	60.3	66.8	58.0	41.00**
Relationship type					
Dating	93.4	71.4	65.5	82.3	147.02**
Engaged	4.3	8.6	13.3	5.6	
Married	2.3	20.0	21.2	12.0	
Relationship length					
1–6 months	38.2	27.5	24.6	33.2	98.42**
6 months–1 yr	42.2	32.6	28.1	39.2	
1–2 yr	27.9	22.3	17.9	25.1	
2 yr or more	19.6	40	47.5	27.6	
Cohabiting	9.3	31.8	31.3	14.3	99.34**
Sexually active	75.3	72.0	76.3	43.4	99.14**

[a]*N*'s vary slightly from question to question due to variation in missing data. ** = $P < .01$.

Prevalence. Prevalence refers to whether respondents carried out one or more of the 12 acts of physical assault in the CTS in the previous 12 months. The analysis used two measures of prevalence, one for any versus no assault (referred to as "??assault"), and one for severe assault versus both no assaults and minor assaults (referred to as "severe assault").

Severity level. A problem with the Minor Assault scale is that some of the respondents who reported minor assaults probably also carried out more severe attacks on a partner. To have a variable in which the two are mutually exclusive, respondents were classified into one of three categories: 1 = none, 2 = minor only (i.e., one or more acts of minor violence but no instance of severe violence), and 3 = severe.

Chronicity. The CTS asks respondents to indicate how many times in the previous year they have either perpetrated or been victim of each of the acts in the scale. Chronicity was calculated only for respondents who reported at least one instance of physical assault. Chronicity therefore indicates the number of times that subjects who were physically aggressive to a partner carried out acts of physical aggression. For a discussion of the rationale of the chronicity measure of the CTS2 see Straus [2001].

Symmetry types. Three types were identified: *male-only* refers to couples in which violence in the relationship was perpetrated only by the male partner. *Female-only* violence refers to couples where the only violence in the relationship was perpetrated by the female partner. *Both* refers to couples in which both the male and female partner committed at least one of the acts of physical assault in the previous 12 months. Symmetry types were computed only if the respondent reported that they, and/or their partner had perpetrated an assault.

Social Desirability Response Bias

Criminological research that uses self-report data need to take into account defensiveness or minimization of socially undesirable behavior. The Limited Disclosure scale of the PRP [Straus and Mouradian, 1999; Straus et al., 1999] was used to control for the variation in individual respondents' tendencies to minimize socially undesirable behavior. This scale is a 13-item version of the widely used Crown–Marlow social desirability scale developed by Reynolds [1982]. The scale measures the degree to which respondents tend to avoid disclosing socially undesirable behavior.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status was measured as a composite of the respondent's mother's and father's education, and family income. To control for differences in educational systems and for differences in incomes and purchasing power across countries and geographic regions, parent's education and family income were standardized (z-scored) separately for each sample, before being summed. For interpretability, the sum was then transformed to a z-score. Thus, in each sample, the score of a respondent indicates the number of standard deviations above or below the mean of respondents in that sample.

RESULTS

Prevalence of Assaults on Dating Partners

Combined samples. When all four samples are analyzed together, a third of the students (33.7%) reported they had physically assaulted a dating partner in the previous 12 months. This is consistent with many other studies of dating violence by university students [Archer, 2000; Katz et al., 2002; Sugarman and Hotaling, 1989].

Sample differences. The percent of students reporting violence was high in all four samples, but also differed significantly between samples ($\chi^2 = 29.258$, $P < .001$). The lowest rate was in New Hampshire (29.7%), followed by Texas, Non-Mexican Whites (30.9%), Texas Mexican American (34.2%), and the highest rate of assault was in Juarez (46.1%).

Gender differences. Although there were significant differences between samples. Within each of the four samples, the row for Prevalence in Part A of Table II shows that the rates for males and females were similar ($P = .74$). Thus, the four samples analyzed in this paper, had similar rates of partner-assault by men and women. This finding is consistent with previous research on couple conflict discussed in the introduction.

TABLE II. Prevalence and Chronicity of Partner Violence by Males and Females

	Male ($N = 511$)	Female ($N = 1{,}030$)	Total ($N = 1{,}541$)	P
Part A: overall violence				
Prevalence	30.0%	34.6%	33.7%	$\leq .74$
Chronicity				
Mean (SD)	16.3 (31.54)	11.6 (19.06)	12.9 (23.62)	$\leq .15$
Median	4	4	4	
Part B: severe violence				
Prevalence	11.0%	11.6%	11.4%	$\leq .76$
Chronicity				
Mean (SD)	21.9 (19.03)	9.3 (12.86)	15.6 (20.28)	$\leq .001$
Median	11	3	4	

Notes: (1) Significance level based on χ^2 test for prevalence and analysis of variance for chronicity. (2) The means in this table are before adjustment for SES, age, or social desirability scale score. They therefore differ from the means in the figures which are adjusted for differences in these three variables.

Severe Assaults on Dating Partners

The similar rates of assaulting a partner by men and women could be misleading because the overall rate combines minor acts such as slapping and throwing things with more severe assaults involving punching, kicking, choking, etc. It is possible that the overall rate of assaults could be equal, but a larger proportion of the assaults by men could be in the form of attacks that are more likely to result in an injury. This possibility was investigated by examining the severity level of assaults.

Combined samples. Overall, more than one out of ten students (11.4%) reported severely attacking a partner (acts such as punching, kicking, or choking).

Sample differences. The samples differed significantly ($\chi^2 = 8.37$, $P < .04$) in the rate of severe violence. The differences were similar to the difference for the overall violence rate, i.e., the lowest rate was in New Hampshire (9.3%), followed by Mexican-Americans in Texas (12.4%), Non-Mexicans in Texas (14.2%) and highest in Juarez (15%).

Gender differences. The row for Prevalence in Part B of Table II shows that the rates of severe assault are almost identical for men and women ($\chi^2 = 0.09$, $P = .76$). Thus, the similarity between

men and women in the overall rate of violence against a partner also applies to severe attacks.

When severity level scores were examined using ANCOVA (controlling for age, SES, and score on the Social Desirability Response scale), no significant differences in the scores of male and female students were found ($F = 0.07$, $P = .78$). The interaction of gender and sample was also non-significant ($F = 0.70$, $P = .55$) indicating that the absence of a gender difference applied to all four samples.

Chronicity of Assaults

Combined samples. The results from these four samples show that, among the couples where there was violence, it was not usually a one-time occurrence. Students who were physically aggressive to a partner carried out a mean of 14.7 acts of physical aggression in the previous 12 months. However, the mean overstates the typical pattern because of a relatively few cases in which violence occurred once a week or more, including a few where it was almost daily. Therefore, the median of four times in the pervious year gives a better picture of the typical pattern of violence between dating couples.

A surprising finding was that average number of *severe* assaults (15.6) and the median number of severe assaults (4) was just about the same as mean and medians for the total assault scale. This indicates that when violence is severe, it also tends to be as chronic as minor assaults.

Sample differences. The chronicity of overall assaults was similar across samples ($F = 1.11$, $P = .35$). The chronicity of severe assaults was also similar across samples ($F = 1.03$, $P < .38$). Thus, the mean chronicity of both overall and severe assaults is similar across the four samples.

Gender differences. There was no significant difference between males and females in the chronicity of physical aggression overall ($F = 2.33$, $P = .13$). However, when severe assaults were considered separately, men hit their partner more than twice as frequently as women (mean of 21.9 times versus 9.3 times, $F = 11.29$, $P < .001$). The median for severe violence by men was four times in the previous year and for women three times. The large difference between the mean and the median indicates that for both men and women, but especially for men, the high mean score reflects a large influence of a relatively few extremely violent individuals. Results of tests for equality of medians and Wilcox rank sum tests are consistent with the results from the ANCOVA, indicating that regardless of whether the mean or median is used, men who severely attacked their partner during the 12 month period covered by this study tended to do so more often than the women who engaged in severe assaults. Tests for a sample by gender interaction were non-significant for both overall ($F = 0.49$, $P = .69$) and severe assaults ($F = 0.48$, $P = .69$). Thus, the analysis indicates that in all four samples, among individuals who assaulted their partners, men, and women did so with similar frequency, in contrast, among individuals who were severely violent, men severely assaulted their partners more frequently than women.

Gender Symmetry in Assaults

Combined samples. Among the 553 couples where one or both of the partners were violent, in almost three quarters of the cases (71.2%) gender symmetry was found, that is, both partners perpetrated one or more assault. When only one partner was violent, this was more than twice as likely to be the female partner (19.0%) as the male partner (9.8%). Among the 205 couples where there was an act of severe aggression, symmetry was less prevalent (56.6%), but when only one partner was violent, it was again twice as likely to be the female partner (29.8% female only versus 13.7% male partner only).

The finding that women are more likely to be the only violent partner differs from the results of studies of married and cohabiting couples in the general population. General population studies tend to show that, when there is violence by only one partner, it is as likely to be the male partner as the female partner. This is illustrated by the data for the nationally representative sample of couples in Figure 1. It shows almost identical rates of partner assault by males and females, except for the youngest couples. At ages 18–19, the rate for women is 47% greater than the rate for men. At age 20–24 women exceed men by 18%, however, among respondents 25 and over, rates of partner assault are almost identical for men and women. A meta analysis of 37 studies of college students and 27 studies of community samples found that in the community samples the rate of PV by women exceeded the male rate only very slightly. However, among the student samples, the female rate was greater than the rate of PV by males [Archer, 2000]. Thus, the younger the individual, the more the female rate of assaulting a partner exceeds the rate for males. If that generalization is correct, the tendency in this sample of students for

women to more often be the only violent partner probably reflects the youthfulness of the sample.

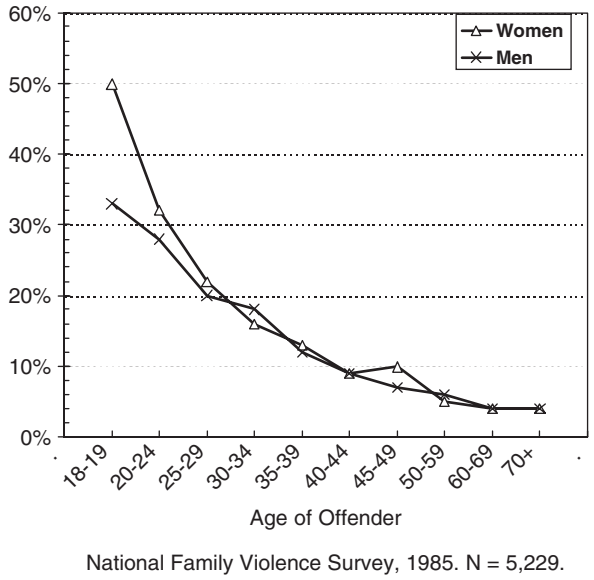
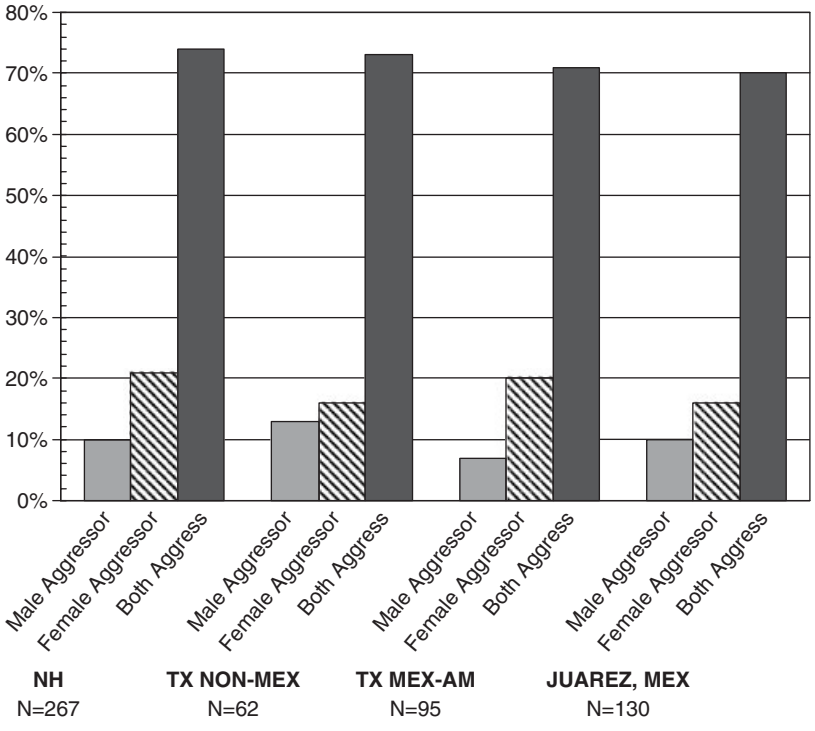


Fig. 1. Partner assault rates by age and sex of offender.

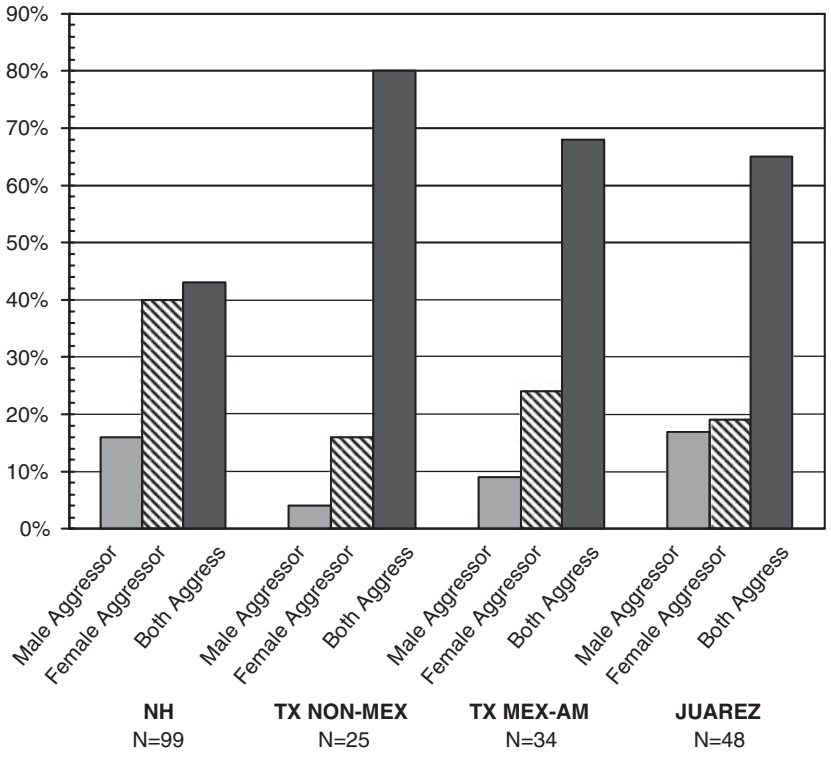
Sample differences. Figure 2 shows gender symmetry in the overall assault rate across samples. These differences were not statistically significant, indicating that the pattern of predominantly mutual violence described above was consistent when the four samples are examined individually. However, Figure 3 shows significant differences between samples for severe assaults. The most important difference is that students in the New Hampshire sample had by far the lowest percentage in the both category, and the highest percentage in the Female Only category.

The measure of gender symmetry was based on the questionnaire completed by one partner reporting on both their own behavior and the behavior of the partner. This procedure is open to the possibility that what seems to be symmetry could really be the result of men underreporting their violent behavior. To examine this possibility the Gender Symmetry measure was cross-tabulated by the sex of the respondent. Figure 4 shows no significant difference in gender symmetry based on reports by male and female partners.



Chi-squared = 2.672, p.849. (N for Male Aggressors = 54 (NH=26, TX Non-Mex=8, TX Mex-Am=7, Juarez=13). N for Female-Only Aggressors = 105 (NH=55, TX Non-Mex=10, TX Mex-Am=19, Juarez=21). N for Both Violent = 395 (NH=186, TX Non-Mex=44, TX Mex-Am=69, Juarez=96)

Fig. 2. Percent of male-only, female-only, and both violent couples in four samples (all assaults).



Chi-squared = 17.57, p .007. N for Male-Only Aggressor = 28 (NH=16, TX Non-Mex=1, TX Mex-Am=3, Juarez=8). N for Female-Only Aggressor = 61(NH=40, TX Non-Mex=4, TX Mex-Am=8, Juarez=9). N for Both = 117 (NH=43, TX Non-Mex=20, TX Mex-Am=23, Juarez=31)

Fig. 3. Percent of male-only, female-only, and both violent couples in four samples (severe assaults).

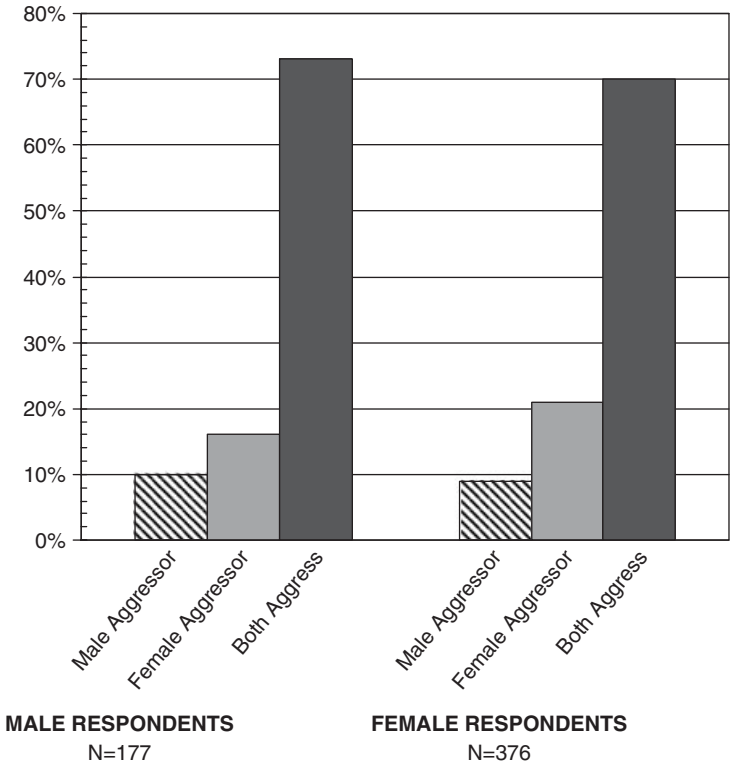
DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide strong evidence of gender symmetry in respect to violence against a dating partner. First, the results were similar in four different samples with large differences in the socio-cultural setting. Second, the results showing gender symmetry and differences between samples remained after controlling for the age of the respondent, the severity and chronicity of violence, and controlling for socioeconomic status and for social desirability response bias. The results indicate that women and men have similar prevalence rates for both any and sever assaults, and for chronicity of minor assaults. Further, in the majority of couples where one partner is violent, both partners have committed one or more assaults. An important exception to the pattern of gender symmetry was that, among the subgroup of respondents who committed one or more acts of severe violence, men in all four samples did it more often than women. Finally, there is agreement between results based on data provided by males and females.

Methodological Implications

These results have important implications for the methodology of research on PV, and for primary prevention of PV. With respect to methodology, the results show that male or female respondents provide equivalent results. Thus, either partner can be the source of the data in research on PV in non-clinical populations. However, although it is not necessary to obtain data from both partners in a relationship, given that individuals of both sexes appear to underreport their own perpetration, and over-report assaults by partners [Archer, 1999], in any study of gender differences it is desirable to obtain data from both male and female respondents. Additionally, the parallel results in each of the four cultural settings suggests that the Conflict Tactics Scales is appropriate for use in cross-cultural research.

The robustness of the results cited, and the consistency of the results with many previous studies showing gender symmetry in PV, adds urgency to the need for steps to extend efforts at primary and



Chi-square = 1.803, p .406. N for Male Respondents = 177 (Male Aggressor=19, Female Aggressor=28, Both Aggress=130). N for Female Respondents = 376 (Male Aggressor=35, Female Aggressor=77, Both Aggress=264)

Fig. 4. Couple symmetry types by sex of respondent (all assaults).

secondary prevention of PV to women offenders. Also relevant are the studies showing that women initiate PV as often as men [Archer, 2000; Straus, 1999] and the studies showing that women are injured more often and more seriously than men. Consequently, programs and policies aimed at primary prevention of PV *by women* are crucial for reducing the victimization of not only men but also women.

The High Proportion of Female Violence in New Hampshire

The high percentage in the Female Only and Both Violent category in New Hampshire could reflect the operation of two principles. One is the "convergence theory" of crime by women. This theory holds that as women become equal in other spheres of life, they will also tend to become more equal in respect to committing crime [Adler, 1975; Steffensmeier and Allan, 1996]. The data for New Hampshire fits the convergence theory. First, New Hampshire had the highest degree of equality between women and men of the four samples [Straus, 1994; Sugarman and Straus, 1988]. Second, although New Hampshire had the lowest overall rate of PV, among the couples where violence occurred, it had the largest proportion committed by women.

A second possibility is the cost–benefit theory formulated by Archer [2005]. He found that "…sex differences in partner aggression follow the perceived costs and benefits of physically aggressing in that social setting." In patriarchal social settings, violation of the male dominance principle in any form, and specifically by hitting a male partner, is likely to elicit severe physical retaliation [Smuts, 1992]. However, the social context in New Hampshire is almost the opposite. Women at the University of New Hampshire, tend to come from high education and high-income families. Because of the small size of the state, many students live at home and even those living on campus are usually less than an hour from their home. They are thus in relatively protected positions [Figueredo et al., 2001]. However, that also tends to be true of students in Ciudad Juarez and El Paso. Perhaps most important, women in New Hampshire have a relatively high degree of equality with men

[Sugarman and Straus, 1988] and physical violence against female partners is relatively low compared to other states of the USA [Straus, 1994]. These characteristics may lower the costs women perceive of hitting a partner, and thus alter the cost–benefit ratio enough to produce a higher rate of violence by women than in the other samples.

These comments suggest some issues for future research. For example, why do women, who are on average weaker than men, engage in and initiate violence at least as often as men, whereas outside of family and dating relationships, women engage in a fraction of the violence perpetrated by men? Although Straus [1999] has outlined a theoretical model which might explain the discrepancy, it has yet to be tested. Another important avenue of research is twin studies which could provide information on genetic and environmental factors that predict PV. We know of only one such study [Hines and Saudino, 2004]. Another needed type of research on gender symmetry in PV concerns the social context. One aspect of social context that has been investigated is the degree to which the society and the family system is male-dominant [Archer, 2005; Straus, 1994]. However, the many other possible social context effects is illustrated by the Culture of Honor theory [Figueredo et al., 2004; Nisbett and Cohen, 1996] which states that violence in defense of honor will be more prevalent in ancestrally herding than in traditionally faming communities. The differences between samples in this study are consistent with that theory. In addition, Figueredo et al. [2001] found gender symmetry in endorsement of honor violence in a Mexican sample.

Prevention Implications

Almost all primary and secondary prevention efforts are based on the assumption that PV is perpetrated primarily by men. There are several reasons for this false assumption. First, programs to end PV were initiated by and continue to be a major effort of the women's movement. Another reason is that women are much more likely to be physically, psychologically, and economically injured [Archer, 2000; Stets and Straus, 1990; Straus, 2005] than men. Finally, about 90% of assaults and murders outside the family are perpetrated by men and it is easy to assume that this must also apply to PV.

PV by men, but not by women has been decreasing since the mid 1970s but PV by women on male partners have stayed about the same [Smithey and Straus, 2004, Figures 1 and 4; Straus, 1995]. The failure of prevention and treatment programs to address PV by women may partly explain why PV by men has decreased, but PV by women has remained constant. An ironic aspect is that although the number of male victims has remained high, there is no funding for services for male victims, and almost no research on male victims of PV.

Rather than ignoring assaults by female partners, primary prevention of PV requires strong efforts to end assaults by women. A fundamental reason is the intrinsic moral wrong of assaulting a spouse, as expressed in the fact that such assaults are criminal acts, even when no injury occurs. Second, males are the victims of about a third of injuries inflicted on partners, including about a third of homicides of partners [Straus, 2005]. Third is the unintended validation by women of the traditional cultural norms tolerating a certain level of violence between spouses. A fourth reason for a strong effort to reduce PV by women is the danger of escalation when women engage in "harmless" minor violence. Feld and Straus [1989] found that if both partners were violent, it increased the probability that assaults are likely to persist or escalate in severity over the 2 year period of their study; whereas if only one partner engaged in physical attacks, the probability of a subsequent violence decreased. Finally, when a woman assaults her partner, it "models" violence for the children and therefore contributes to PV in the next generation. This modeling effect is as strong for assaults by women as is assaults by men [Jaffe et al., 1990; Straus, 1983; Straus and Yodanis, 1996; Straus et al., 2006 [1980].

Although it is essential that primary and secondary prevention of PV include a major focus on violence by women as well as men, the needed change must be made with extreme care for a number of reasons. First, it must be done in ways that simultaneously refute the idea that violence by women justifies or excuses violence by their partners. Second, although women may assault partners at approximately the same rate as men, assaults by men usually inflict greater physical, financial, and emotional injury [Archer, 2000; Stets and Straus, 1990]. This means that male violence against women, on average, results in more severe victimization. Thus, a focus on protecting and assisting female victims must remain a priority; despite the fact that services for male victims (now essentially absent) need to be made available. Finally, in many societies women lack full economic, social, political, and human rights. In such cultural contexts, equality for women needs to be given priority as an even more fundamental aspect of primary prevention of

PV. Otherwise focusing on PV by women can further exacerbate the oppression of women in those societies.

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